

Alternative report
from the Norwegian Kveni Association/Ruijan Kveeniliitto
to
THE SECOND PERIODIC REPORT SUBMITTED BY NORWAY
IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE 25 § 1
OF THE FRAMEWORK CONVENTION FOR
THE PROTECTION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES
Tromsø 13.12.2005

I – Introductory remarks

Background

This report is submitted in accordance with article 25 paragraph 1 of the council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Our report is based on the framework convention's articles seen in relation to Norway's second periodic report on the implementation of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development – October 2005). We have also seen the report in relation to the resolution from the Committee of Ministers (Res CMN (2003) 6, adopted April 8, 2003) on Norway's implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and statements and feedback between the Advisory Committee for the framework convention and Norway in the period between the first and second periodic reports. As the second Norwegian periodic report was not completed until October last year, several months after the deadline set by the Council of Europe, our alternative report is also delayed as a consequence.

Report structure

In this alternative report, we have chosen not to comment on all aspects of the framework convention. We have focussed on the areas in which we believe the Norwegian authorities have not fulfilled their obligations and/or provided incomplete information in respect to how the framework concerns the Kven minority. We have chosen to concentrate our report on what we believe are the most important conditions and have referred to the relevant points in the framework convention.

II – Presentation of the Norwegian Kveni Association/Ruijan Kveeniliitto (NKF/RK)

NKF/RK is a nationwide voluntary organisation for everyone who considers they are of Kven or Finnish descent. The organisation was established in 1987 and now has more than 800 members. The association is the only nationwide organisation representing Kven people in Norway. The association comprises nine branches, most of which are in the northern counties of Troms and Finnmark. One also covers the central area of Eastern Norway. A national executive elected at the national conference manages the association's affairs between national conferences and executive meetings. The association's chairman is Henry A. Osima

from Oslo. The association has an office in Tromsø and has a secretary employed on a part-time basis (equivalent to three days a week). This is not an ideal situation given the workload, but is dictated by budget constraints. Other work is conducted on a voluntary basis, although the chairman and deputy chairman receive a modest honorarium.

The association's defined objective is to: ***improve conditions for Kven people and people of Finish descent – socially, culturally and economically.***

The association's main source of funding is grants from the State via the Department of Sami and Minority Affairs, a department of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. The association's activity level is determined to a large extent by the association's funding level and given the current level of funding only a minimum effort is possible in the majority of important areas. Funding does not permit the necessary effort in cost-generating areas like international work and support for cultural development.

Tasks given priority by the NKF/RK are to work for:

- to achieve political acceptance of the Kven population's status and rights. Seek an independent clarification of the Kven situation.
- revitalise the Kven language and develop a Kven written language.
- strengthen Kven culture, first and foremost by working to establish a specific Kven cultural fund to support the construction of Kven cultural institutions.
- international co-operation with other minority groups and indigenous peoples.

III The main aspects about Norway's report which we would like to comment on:

IIIa Clarification of the Kven situation

This primarily concerns the Framework Conventions articles 12 and 15 as well as indirectly concerning several other articles.

The Advisory Committee for the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (in future referred to as the advisory committee) asked in point 11 of its statement dated September 12 for general remarks about the official statistical data about ethnic distribution of the population and the status of important areas of society. In its reply dated October 14, Norway stated (in point 69) that, in conjunction with representatives of the national minorities, it is introducing methods to improve statistical material. As of today's date, this has not occurred.

In its second periodic report (Part II, B – General), Norway has stated: *“In respect to Norwegian law, it is impossible to develop personal statistics on the basis of ethnicity”* and also alleged that *“The national minorities, especially Romani/Tattare are extremely sceptical about this type of statistics. Dialogue is currently in progress between the authorities and the national minorities in order to be able to say more about the living conditions for the groups as a basis for policy development”*.

It is completely wrong to state that the Kven people oppose the development of statistics on ethnicity and living conditions. To the contrary, we have long been asking for a clarification and detailed statement of these conditions. In our opinion, it is entirely possible to do this without developing personal statistics on the basis of ethnicity, and we believe this argument is being used as an excuse for not starting the clarification or detailed statement NKF/RK has asked for. Incomplete knowledge about the status of the Kven people, including information about what proportion of the population the Kven minority constitutes, is one of the factors depriving our association the necessary strength in our demands for influence in a variety of areas. In addition, this is being used to legitimise the enormous difference in treatment in many areas of the two large minorities of the north, the Samis and the Kvens.

In its comments to the advisory committee dated October 14, Norway stated (point 88) that work is underway to produce new information material regarding national minorities. We cannot see that this process has started, and we certainly have not been invited to participate in this process. However, the preparation of new material about the Kven people will be of little value unless the central questions concerning the Kvens are clarified.

The Norwegian State has consistently practiced difference in treatment of the national minorities covered by the Council of Europe's Framework Convention and that covered by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 169. This difference in treatment has been reinforced in every State budget over a long period, and the proposed budget for 2005 is no exception. The national minorities covered by the Council of Europe's framework convention receive joint support that constitutes a tiny percentage in comparison to that given to one minority covered by the ILO convention 169. The same conditions apply in all areas, culturally, with respect to rights, language and so on. **We cannot see that the above-mentioned conventions can in any way defend this difference in treatment.**

IIIb Language

This concerns the framework convention's articles 5, 9, 11, 12 and 13.

In the spring of 2005, Kven gained the status of a language in its own right (category 2). NKF/RK is satisfied that the language has received this recognition from the authorities. However, this is insufficient to ensure the development and revitalisation of the language. There is currently no dictionary, grammar or text book to make satisfactory teaching of the language possible. There is also a shortage of teachers in our sister language, Finnish, and, above all, Kven. Work is underway by many sources and different organisations to amend these conditions. This includes the co-ordination of a revitalisation project run by NKF/RK in collaboration with different organisations and with valuable support from Norwegian authorities. However, even greater effort is required, directly stimulated by earmarked funding from Norwegian authorities to ensure that the development of the language will not be too protracted, and that the recognition of the Kven language will not simply amount to a positive written resolution.

IIIc Media

This concerns the framework convention's article 9

The second Norwegian periodic report mentions two extremely important points for the Kven minority. These relate to the sole Kven newspaper, Ruijan Kaiku (RK), and conditions relating to access to the State broadcaster NRK.

With respect to the newspaper, the current situation is that the newspaper receives NOK 750,000 in state funding, of which NOK 150,000 must be re-applied for on an annual basis. In spite of the fact that this funding has increased since the first Norwegian periodic report, the current level of funding is nowhere near what is required to provide a satisfactory newspaper offer for the Kvens and the population of Finnish descent. Therefore, NKF/RK is working to convert RK into a weekly publication. In order to achieve this, a significant funding increase is required. Norwegian authorities have placed RK in the budgetary category of “Other Publications” in the State Budget along with newspapers for, among other things, sexual minorities. The level of funding support for these publications is considerably lower than that which applies for Sami newspapers, which is a far more natural comparison for RK. We are, therefore, expecting RK to gain the same framework conditions as those which apply to Sami newspapers, something which will make it possible to develop the newspaper into an important news source and cultural developer for the Kven people and the Kven language.

Insufficient broadcasts in Finnish have been pointed out by the Council of Europe. The following response was provided in the second Norwegian periodic report:

The resolution referred to is positive, but has not led to any positive results. The broadcast time has not increased as a result of the resolution! This is most unfortunate when seen in the context of the Kven language’s new status. Norwegian authorities refer to the fact that NRK is an independent entity, which cannot be directed by the authorities. However, we anticipate that the authorities will utilise their influence, including through the board, to alert the Director of Broadcasting to the resolution’s significance.

III d Culture

Covered by the framework convention’s articles 5 and 12

The Kven culture has, in the same way as the Kven language, has been a major sufferer from an often aggressive policy of “Norwegianilising” by the Norwegian State. As a consequence of this, important aspects of the Kven culture are severely endangered in large parts of the Kven core area. It is now urgent that we preserve what remains of the Kven culture. Unfortunately this can only occur through a significant direct stimulation of Kven culture. Even though the ”Norwegianilising” is of course no longer an official Norwegian policy, negative differences in the treatment of the Kven culture still occur.

The most serious instance is the lack of a Kven cultural fund. In the preparation of white paper 44, the conditions for Sami and Kven concerning the lack of access to schooling immediately after World War II placed on an even footing. On the basis of these conditions, the Sami people have been able to get a fund for the Sami people established. The Norwegian Kveni Association expects that the State take the consequences of this indisputable difference of treatment and establish a Kven fund with the same economic framework as that which applies for the Sami people’s fund. NKF wants such a fund to be used to support the Kven language and culture. Living Kven culture currently receives no earmarked funding. A previously rich culture is now endangered to a large extent. The establishment of a Kven Culture Fund will be an important injection and could contribute to the rich Kven culture blossoming once again.

IV Summary

In the above text, NKF/RK has thrown light on our views on the challenges the Kven population is facing in light of the framework convention.

The following are the decisive points for developing of the Kven identity:

- **Clarification of the Kven situation**

- **Revitalisation of the Kven language**

- **Improvement of the Kven media offer** by making it possible for Ruijan Kaiku to become a weekly publication, and showing the Kven minority to a far higher degree on NRK.

- **Establishment of a Kven culture fund**

We hope that the Council of Europe will assess our input in these areas and, if in agreement with our assessments, assist to influence the Norwegian authorities to follow up the points raised.

The Norwegian State has consistently practiced difference in treatment of the national minorities covered by the Council of Europe's Framework Convention and that covered by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 169. This difference in treatment has been reinforced in every State budget over a long period, and the proposed budget for 2005 is no exception. The national minorities covered by the council of Europe's Framework Convention receive joint support that constitutes a tiny percentage in comparison to that given to one minority covered by the ILO convention 169. The same conditions apply in all fields, culturally, with respect to rights, language and so on. **We cannot see that the above-mentioned conventions can in any way defend this difference in treatment.**

Positive dialogue is in progress between the NKF/RK and Norwegian authorities. The established contact forum for national minorities is one forum where we can present our views to Norwegian authorities. Minutes are not taken during these forums and, as a result, we have experienced that points we have raised have not been registered by the political authorities to an adequate degree. The vastly differing challenges for the various national minorities in Norway means the contact forum is of limited value. It must, therefore, be supplemented by other forms of dialogue between the minority in question and the Norwegian authorities.

There is also a need for the framework convention to be implemented at regional and local management level, something which currently occurs to an extremely limited extent. In order to achieve this, we expect that central authorities will contribute information. A good illustration of this is the rejection by the Finnmark County Council of an application for signage of Vadsø High School in Kven. The explanation given was that signage in Sami was possible because the Sametinget (the Sami parliament) provided the necessary funding, but it was not possible in Kven due to economical reasons as similar funding was not available on the Kven side. This is but one of countless examples that the framework convention is not followed up at a local and regional level.